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AUTHOR Switzer, Jo Young
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ABSTRACT

In order to attract strong faculty members, many of whom may not realize initially the distinctive strengths of small colleges, small schools need to work hard and plan well to recruit and hire qualified faculty in communication and theatre. A search and screen process which presents an accurate and attractive picture of the small college is an important part in achieving that end. The first step in the process is a thorough consideration of the nature of the position. The department should be explicit about the duties that will be assumed by the new faculty member, and should encourage administrators to offer the most competitive salary possible. The second step, publicizing the position, is best carried out through a combination of an advertisement in at least one of the national publications with distribution of a printed flyer. The third step, the interview, is the most powerful way to convey to the candidate the distinctive attractiveness of the college. Involvement of top level administrators and/or students in the interview process stresses an institution's distinctiveness. Candidates, who are likely to assume that the publish or perish model which is active in many institutions is being followed, should be informed if a school bases tenure and promotion upon different criteria. Information highlighting the attractiveness of the living situation, academic distinctiveness, and fringe benefits should also be offered. (ARH)

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Small College Faculty Recruitment: Communication Strategies

Jo Young Switzer

Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne

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Communication departments in colleges and universities face a variety of challenges recruiting and hiring qualified faculty members. The recruiting and hiring process, regardless of how well-conceived and well-practiced, is complex. Public and private institutions must regularly deal with it. All share several goals as they deal with recruitment: they want to attract the highest quality faculty possible, and most want to present an accurate picture of their institutions to the candidate. Small colleges bring an additional goal to that list: to articulate the advantages of small college teaching. This paper, whose author has taught in a large public institution and has chaired a department in a private liberal arts college, will examine the issue of faculty recruiting in a small college department.

It is no secret that small colleges, particularly those which the Carnegie study (1974) classified as Category II, those which are moderately selective and moderately endowed, have a difficult time competing for quality faculty with public universities. The public universities appear to offer considerably more resources for salaries, release time, and research support. Nonetheless, the communication department in the small college is an attractive professional environment

which deserves to be considered seriously by high quality faculty who are seeking employment. Small colleges need to conduct their search and screen processes in ways that increase the likelihood that good candidates will find the small college to be an attractive and viable career choice.

This paper will look at the recruiting process that might be undertaken by departments of communication or theatre in small colleges. The entire discussion is based on the premise that resources, both monetary and otherwise, are limited at the recruiting institution. Suggestions will presuppose a modest budget and limited secretarial help. This paper will, however, make numerous concrete suggestions about ways to maximize the resources that are available, including those involving clear communication with the candidates.

Describing the Position

The first step in the process is a thorough consideration of the nature of the position. That discussion may occur at various levels in the college, but it certainly needs to start at the departmental level. The department should be explicit about the duties, both curricular and co-curricular, that will be assumed by the new hire. If the position has an interdisciplinary

component, a situation not uncommon at liberal arts schools, consultation can be made early with any other department that might be involved in the selection.

The preliminary discussion of the nature of the position often provides a small department an opportunity to reassess and clarify the departmental curriculum. In a small program, more than in a large institution, the nature of one individual position has profound implications for the major. Before posting a new position, open discussion can enhance the clarity of the search as well as the quality of the program. As the department writes the position description, care should be taken to state clearly the nature of the demands that will be placed on the new hire. For example, many small colleges, although not all, emphasize high quality teaching over basic research. If top quality undergraduate teaching is at the heart of the mission of the school, the position description should reflect this priority.

When department members in a small college consult with higher level administrators about the position, they can persuasively demonstrate how the position can not only enhance the department but can also aid the college. For instance, in recruiting a forensics coach, arguments can be made about how a

strong, energetic forensics program can aid in student recruitment. The current student recruiting climate is characterized by a shortage of high caliber academically-oriented students. One can argue persuasively that a well-directed forensics program will attract not just more students but those who are stronger academically.

Second, administrators should be encouraged to offer the most competitive salary possible. Because they may not be familiar with salaries in the discipline, the department representative can collect data in advance of the meeting. By consulting recent issue of Spectra (the S.C.A. Placement bulletin) and Chronicle of Higher Education, the department chair can demonstrate the salary ranges necessary for attracting quality applicants. Third, the department, if it does not have competent, professional secretarial help, should seek such help from the administrator for all clerical duties associated with the search and screen process. This third suggestion may seem trivial to faculty members and departmental administrators who have always worked in public institutions; but many departments in small colleges exist without secretarial help. The search process is not the time to "make do." In the initial contacts

with upper-level administrators, it is imperative to request secretarial support for correspondence related to the search process.

Publicizing the Position

Since procedures for authorizing positions vary so much from one institution to another, this paper will not focus on the actual authorization process. Regardless of who authorizes the position, the next stage in the process is for the department to advertise the opening. Within whatever budgetary constraints exist, it is helpful to post the position as widely as possible. Several widely-used methods for posting present themselves: Spectra, Chronicle of Higher Education, and a broad mailing. Depending on when in the calendar month authorization is final, Spectra's first-of-the-month deadline may mean that information about the position cannot even be distributed until nearly two months after the job is authorized. Chronicle has a much shorter turnaround time.

Probably the most attractive approach is to combine an advertisement in at least one of the national publications with distribution of a printed flyer. If possible, the flyer and the published advertisement should stress the distinctive nature of

the institution. Moreover, the flyer should be accurate and neat. This is not the time to skimp on printing or paper. The printed flyer can be sent to all speech departments in the country or to a more limited geographical area. The SCA Directory has the necessary addresses. Special care should be taken so that women and minorities have access to the flyers. Flyers can also be sent to prospective candidates or specific persons who might know of good prospective applicants.

Candidates begin to form their impressions about the institution and the position with the initial advertisement. Those impressions are elaborated and solidified by early correspondence and telephone calls. Platt provides guidelines for the interview planning process (1987). He notes that after the travel arrangements have been made, but before the candidate visits campus, a confirmation letter should be sent. In addition to the standard information included in that letter, the mailing can also include the specific itinerary, a college catalogue, divisional and departmental brochures, a campus map, and even a parking sticker. Professionalism throughout is essential.

Hosting the Interview

The interview itself is probably the most powerful way to convey to the candidate the distinctive attractiveness of the college. Because small colleges usually do not, by reason of their size, conduct as many interviews as larger institutions, the smaller schools may be less sensitive to the image they present to outsiders. Small colleges, like small towns, often operate as though everyone "just knows" how things are done and where the buildings are. Because they experience less movement of personnel in and out of their ranks, departments need to remind themselves prior to actual interviews with prospective faculty members what impressions the newcomers might form of the college. With that awareness, the department can plan an effective interview visit.

As well in advance as possible, the department should prepare a printed schedule for the candidate's visit. The schedule should be circulated to all who will participate. All participants on the schedule should be thoroughly identified for the candidate. At a large public institution, the candidate deals mostly with persons from the discipline and can, therefore, investigate before the interview to become familiar with their areas of expertise and other pertinent credentials. At small

colleges, however, it is not uncommon for faculty members from different disciplines to be active in the interview. The candidate will appreciate being told the discipline of each and the reasons for his/her presence on the committee. If the institution prides itself on quality of attention to students, then students should be an active part of the interview. Students may be appropriately invited to the candidate's presentation. Invitations to the students should be extended enough ahead of time to increase the likelihood of good attendance. If it is appropriate, schedule the interview portion that involves students at a time of day (mid-morning or late afternoon) when light refreshments could be offered, an additional enticement for students to attend.

If the college stresses teaching more than research, the candidate's presentation might be one in which he/she presents a representative undergraduate lecture rather than a research presentation. With the presentation structured as a typical lecture, students will be helpful to the selection committee as they give their evaluations of the presentation. Their presence and active participation may also be impressive to candidates who are not accustomed to high levels of commitment and involvement from undergraduate students.

An additional suggestion is warranted. Because small colleges often conduct less recruitment, faculty members may not be clearly aware of affirmative action guidelines which may affect the legality of certain questions. A brief review session should be conducted for all campus personnel who will participate in the interview prior to the event so that the department chair, dean, or affirmative action official can inform them about restrictions on their inquiries.

Stressing Distinctiveness

During the interview, the college has its best opportunity to demonstrate its distinctiveness. Because distinctiveness is a pivotal issue, each college needs to emphasize whatever unique qualities make it qualitatively different from and more attractive than other larger institutions. There are varying ways to accomplish this.

First, if the college is small and top level administrators are accessible, it will be impressive to involve them in substantive ways in the interview process. A candidate interviewing at a large public institution will rarely have breakfast with the president, but such an event is quite possible

at many small colleges. Demonstrating the accessibility and involvement of high level administrators can be a powerful way for setting this interview apart from others.

Second, the appropriate persons should clarify to the candidate the distinctive procedures and standards for promotion and tenure. Many candidates, especially those finishing doctorates at large research-oriented institutions, do not have a clear understanding of the wide range of criteria by which institutions grant tenure and offer promotions. Most candidates likely assume the publish or perish model which is active in many institutions. If the particular college has a different set of criteria, these need to be made clear to the prospective faculty member for two reasons: 1) to present an accurate picture, and 2) to give the person the opportunity to assess whether he/she would be willing and able to work effectively within that system. As Benjamin noted (1980): " . . . an excellent teacher whose primary interests are not in research would be happier at one of the many four year colleges . . . instead of a heavily research-oriented institution" (p. 85). Matthews (1982) described the varied standards for promotion and tenure decisions. His description of changes within the discipline underscores the need for each

institution and candidate to share clear information about these issues during the initial interview. Particularly in situations in which the institutional standards have changed dramatically, the candidate needs to be informed. Emmert wrote; "Frankly, it almost seems as though those of us who got in when things were good are now willing to demonstrate our commitment to quality . . by making new faculty jump hurdles we never had as obstacles and which many of us could not have cleared when promotion and tenure decisions were made about us" (1986, p. 45). Small college norms about promotion and tenure may differ from what faculty members think is typical. As much as possible, that information should be made explicit in the interview, especially if it is distinctive.

Miller summarized that of key importance to a candidate is information about salary; benefits; place in the department; expectations about teaching, research, and service loads; and administrator-faculty relations (1987, p. 59). With careful thought to the candidate's information needs, adequate data can be supplied.

Third, if the college is in a small town or in a particularly remote location, special efforts should be made to inform the candidate about the community. Since size and

location may, on the surface, appear to be liabilities, any information which can highlight the attractiveness of the living situation should be offered. For example, if low cost of living makes a modest salary more attractive, that information should be given along with information about housing availability and costs, schools, shopping, and cultural opportunities. One small midwestern college in a town of only 5,000 residents attracted talented musicians to the music department because the community, despite its size, had a semi-professional symphony orchestra. Moreover, a highly regarded professional philharmonic orchestra was only a forty minute drive away. Those attractive features needed to be shared explicitly with interviewing candidates because they were not features that a candidate would normally expect.

Other distinctive aspects of small colleges can be emphasized during the interview. If, for example, the college prides itself on personal treatment for each student, the candidate needs to hear faculty members calling students by name. If the college has a strong interdisciplinary program, involve the interviewee in a division meeting if one occurs during the interview. If, unlike large public institutions, faculty members can attend concerts and athletic events at no charge, invite the

interviewee to one scheduled during the interview. If parking is abundant and free, point that out. If private offices are available to all faculty, make that clear.

Academic distinctiveness can also be emphasized. Be sure to tell the candidates about college programs with special academic excellence, even if they do not seem directly related to communication or theatre. For example, if a large percentage of graduates are involved in additional graduate studies, have that specific information available. If the campus has a strong pre-professional program, such as a high rate of acceptance for medical school, include that information because at a small college, those bright science majors will also be enrolled in communication and theatre classes. Also, if the college has an active foreign program, the candidate would benefit from reference to the nature of that program such as descriptions of foreign students and/or faculty on campus, foreign travel for college faculty, and teaching assignments in other countries. Also important to mention are 1) percentage of full-time teaching faculty and 2) average class size, both of which usually demonstrate vividly the small college commitment to undergraduate teaching.

Finally, after candidates have left the campus, the decision-making officials should move quickly toward an attractive offer to the most suitable person. One clear advantage of small colleges at this point is that the speed with which authorization can be accomplished is very quick compared to the more sluggish bureaucracies of larger institutions. It behooves the small college to take advantage of this ability and make an offer promptly. Those candidates who will not receive offers should be informed in writing as soon as possible. Whatever procedures are in effect for completing contractural agreements should be implemented in a professional manner, keeping in mind that the candidate continues to form an impression of the college even during this stage in the process.

In other words, in any ways available, highlight the distinctive attractiveness of the quality of academic life at the college.

Summary

Small private colleges do not carry the prestige or offer the financial resources to faculty that larger institutions do. Persons who have studied and taught in small colleges, however, realize that the quality of undergraduate learning there is not

lower than in larger institutions. In order to attract strong faculty members, many of whom may not realize initially the distinctive strengths of small colleges, small schools need to work hard and plan well to recruit and hire qualified faculty in communication and theatre. A search and screen process which presents an accurate and attractive picture of the small college is an important part in achieving that end.

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